



2006 State of the City of Troy
Hon. Harry J. Tutunjian, Mayor

Good evening. Welcome City Council President Bauer, City Council members, distinguished guests, and fellow residents.

For the better part of two years my administration has worked to improve the quality of life in the City of Troy through hard work, innovative initiatives, renewed energy and a belief that together we can accomplish great things.

It is these four characteristics that have guided my administration during the last two years, and will continue to shape the policy of the City for the next two.

When we talk of hard work, we do so with the conviction that it is our most proud trait. From the very first day we wanted to instill an attitude of doing whatever the job called for, no matter the time of day, or place, it would be done. A fire in Lansingburgh, alley cleanups in South Troy, or snow plowing through the overnight hours, these were just a few of the experiences that bonded the new administration with the City workforce.

Of all the departments in the City, the group that first bought into this idea of getting the job done now, was the Department of Public Works, or as you now know them, The Action Team, led by Commissioner Bob Mirch. When it came to retaking the cleanliness of a City that others had given up on, we approached the task with an attitude of zero tolerance. If an area was left filthy, it was cleaned up right away. The same with long-forgotten alleys. If people were inconsiderate of their neighbors, their mess was cleaned up for them, and they were billed for our time and effort.

When it came to abandoned buildings irritating residents, we made a simple policy decision. Tear them down. If your garbage was out six-days early for trash pickup, you would get a ticket. This is the attitude we developed.

While I am speaking in the past tense, I assure you that none of that has changed in two years. I promise you it will not change anytime soon.

The phrase "cleaner and safer streets" is an award-winner for politicians who like to throw around catch phrases hoping to be remembered. In Troy, we mean cleaner and safer streets. To that end, zero tolerance was also put into place in the Police Department under the guidance of Police Chief Nicholas Kaiser.

As I said last year, we adjusted our crime fighting strategy to make note of the number of citizen complaints concerning quality of life violations and street level activity. It was those issues that needed to be attacked.

The fight against crime continues, and we stress that for it to decrease in a meaningful

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manner, the number of arrests must first increase. Despite this belief, our preliminary numbers for 2005 show that crime in the City of Troy increased less than one half of one percent. In addition to that number, while other local cities saw violent crimes increase by more than 15 percent last year, the City of Troy saw significant drops in the number of cases involving rape, robbery and burglary.

Our Special Operations Unit was once again active in the fight against narcotics, seizing more than 320 pounds of marijuana, 10 ounces of cocaine, 335 bags of heroin, and 380 Methadone pills. They also pulled 35 dangerous weapons off the streets and out of the hands of criminals. All told this one unit made 385 arrests in 2005 and executed 43 warrants.

Much was made of the five homicides the City endured during 2005, which we agree is not acceptable. However, what I want to concentrate on tonight is the quality of police work in each of these crimes. Whether it was an arson or a domestic incident, the detectives in the Troy Police Department made quick work of these violent crimes and sent a strong and clear message to those that think about plying their trade here. Do not do it.

If you come into our City with intentions of disrupting the peaceful way of life, you should know you will pay dearly for that. We will find out what happened, we will track you down, and you will be punished.

Zero tolerance. It is a tough stance to take at times. Easy to talk about, but difficult to implement. Notwithstanding those difficulties, another City department will be reorganized in 2006 through a zero tolerance policy. This department is stretched to its limits already, but that must change if the overall quality of life in the City of Troy is to continue its improvement.

The employees working in Code Enforcement are dedicated to their line of work. But a change in the way code issues are dealt with in the City of Troy needs to happen, and that change begins today. For too long absentee landlords have abused the system in Troy. We have searched for different methods to deal with these problems, but each time we uncover another deficiency. We are left with zero tolerance.

From this point forward, apartments or buildings with significant violations will not be allowed entry until those structures are completely up to code. All codes. This is not to say we will force owners to fix chipped paint on the exterior of a building in the middle of February, but any other issues will be fixed, or there will be consequences.

For too long, irresponsible property owners have ravaged some of our greatest assets while skirting around the codes meant to preserve our neighborhoods and historic structures.

We will place our faith in this new vision of Code Enforcement and do so with the hope that it will forever change the way the City of Troy is looked at. Earlier I mentioned the efforts of the Police Department in reducing crime and improving quality of life.

It is important to note that in the case of the Police Department, they were aided in their pursuit of safer streets through legislation passed by the City Council. Since this

administration first took office we have worked closely with the Council to pass key pieces of legislation, but two of them stick out in my mind because they were asked for by members of the community.

The School Curfew law aims to reduce the number of children and young adults outside of educational facilities during hours when students should be inside learning. This legislation was designed through the cumulative work of the Troy and Lansingburgh School Districts, the Mayor's Office, community police members and the City Council. From what we have been told by those most affected by this law- neighbors, officers, and even students themselves- the idea has worked.

As has another piece of legislation the City Council partnered with the Mayor's Office to complete. Following a homicide on the Fourth of July weekend in 2004, several neighbors on Hill Street requested that something should be done about the convenience store open 24 hours a day where the murder took place.

After talking to members of the police department about other stores around the City, we learned that drug dealers and others were using some of these stores as a place to hide from patrolling officers. In an effort to see this first hand, Deputy Mayor Dan Crawley and I patrolled the streets for several nights in the downtown area, South Troy and Lansingburgh before asking the Council to take action.

The neighbors, as is usually the case, were correct about the situation. These stores were being used for many activities; least among them appeared to be convenience. Shortly thereafter, the Council passed a law curbing the overnight hours of these stores.

It worked. Neighbors are happy and the areas in where these former all-night stores existed are improving through a number of factors. And though it was criticized early on, other municipalities have since contacted Troy about sharing this legislation.

These are two examples of what happens when you combine hard work with innovative thinking. And much like the Police Department was able to tackle issues with additional help, Code Enforcement will have several tools at its disposal in our quest to destroy the sense complacency that has permeated the minds of some "investors" only looking to make a quick buck off of our loyal residents.

We look forward to partnering with the new City Council to develop more exciting initiatives. Last summer we unveiled the second version of the Neighborhood Improvement Through Code Enforcement, or NICE Program, as it is known. After having a successful run in the Beman Park area around the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute campus, it moved to the North Central area of the City last summer. The NICE program fits its acronym well; it is a decent idea that produces consistent results. It is time to think bigger.

In accordance with the five-year plan the City of Troy submitted to the Department of Housing and Urban Development in 2005, we are committed to bring several federally funded programs in-house to improve the efficiency of each one.

Up first is the Home Code Compliance Grant Program, which is designed solely for the purpose of awarding grants to moderate and low-income Troy homeowners for assistance

in bringing buildings up to code. To be clear, this is a homeowner incentive.

Our zero tolerance policy in code enforcement will be a serious matter, and the Code Compliance grants will help residents that otherwise may not have been able to address significant issues on their own.

In the first year of this new initiative we will have close to \$400,000 in grant money to distribute in quantities of \$15,000 to \$40,000. There will be no strings attached, leaving the money available to those who need it most.

The idea to move all of the federally funded CDBG/Home Programs in-house was not an easy policy to change. For many years, several outside agencies have run these programs for the City of Troy, in a variety of different ways. After many internal meetings, and the help of the Deputy Mayor, Comptroller Deborah Witkowski, and planning department staffers, we came to the determination that we could put forth programs in a more beneficial manner for the residents of Troy.

The Code Compliance plans will be an excellent benefit to many people in search of help to improve and reinvest in their properties. We are anxious to see the results, just as we are with the next program, which we believe will make dreams come true.

Several weeks before Christmas I had the opportunity to visit Arabia Allah at her new home in Lansingburgh on the corner of 110th Street. Arabia has two young children named Darnell and Nylasia who were busy enjoying their brand new home when they got a surprise visit from Santa Claus. Arabia is the first person to take advantage of the Self-Sufficiency program that seeks to move public housing residents into homes, not through renting, but through ownership.

While Arabia's kids were busy opening presents, I took a few minutes to look around the house and talk with this young woman. The one thing that struck me was how truly happy she was. When she told you that owning this house was a dream come true, you believed it. The proof was in the expressions on her face as she watched her kids running around from room to room, upstairs and back down. Ladies and gentlemen, Arabia joins us tonight as proof that if you work hard your dreams will materialize. Please give her a warm welcome and congratulations.

It is time to make more of those dreams come true. Many more.

Tonight we unveil an initiative that we believe will transcend the ability of residents in public housing to find decent, affordable, and improved residences that they will be proud to own. In any great project, it is essential that you have a partner that is ready, willing and able. We have that partner in the Troy Housing Authority. Please join me in welcoming THA Executive Director Mario Musolino.

This venture, the Home Investment Program (HIP) has different components that will ensure its success for a long time to come. The first element of this program dictates that Troy creates an inventory of In-Rem and vacant properties that we own.

This inventory will serve as the ground floor of this project before shifting to the Self-Sufficiency program at the Troy Housing Authority. Qualified candidates from the

Housing Authority will then receive the opportunity to pick a home from the assembled group the City has acquired. Which home they decide on will be their choice.

Contractors hired by the City of Troy, and overseen by the Planning Department, will then rehab each of these homes.

Following the rehabilitation the residents will go through a process to qualify for a low-interest Federal Housing Authority Loan to purchase the building directly from the City.

The benefits of this program are almost too numerous to mention:

- None of the money for these programs will come from the City of Troy general fund. The entire program will be federally funded through the HOME Program and Community Development Block Grant monies.
- Buildings that would have either fallen into the hands of irresponsible property owners or disappeared from the tax rolls, will now be taxable properties in the hands of responsible homeowners.
- We will insure that many of our buildings, full of beautiful architecture and historic value will not be lost due to lack of interest.

In addition, the City of Troy is committed to partnering with a local lending institution to guarantee that qualified residents can afford a down payment to purchase their new home.

The strength of HIP is in the people of this City. The residents currently living in the Housing Authority play a vital role in what Troy is, and they will play an integral role in its future as well. This is a smart, sincere investment into our City, its people, and its neighborhoods.

It will take the better part of eight months for the City to build its inventory for HIP. It will also need leadership, as it will be a difficult program to oversee. To that end, I am pleased to announce tonight, that Timothy Mattice will head up this exciting new program.

For the better part of my administration, Tim has stepped in as the Acting Planning Director, and done a great job during a time when we have had numerous development opportunities come before us. I want to thank Tim for his hard work, and hope I can instill confidence in him by saying I believe he will do a strong job in overseeing the new Home Investment Program.

On Monday of this week, we also welcomed a new Planning Commissioner to the City of Troy. I am pleased to introduce to everyone tonight, Judy Breselor. Judy joins our staff after serving as a Senior Planner for the Hudson River Greenway.

Judy joins us at time when the next few years may turn out to be the defining moments of our history. Whether it is small level projects or large-scale reconstructions, we are overflowing with activity in Troy right now.

Just days after receiving approval from the Planning Board last year, BBL Construction broke ground on a project that will bring more than 140 individual apartments to an area of land that was once vacant. These apartments will mainly serve RPI students with state-

of-the-art amenities while providing terrific access to the main campus of the university. And despite the detail that students will be using this residential space, it will be a privately owned facility that will add to our tax base.

Just a few blocks from City Hall there is a development occurring that makes me smile just thinking about it. In the past two years, the Daily Grind, Troy Vision Center, Counties of Ireland, Segel Violins, and Devane's have all developed a commonality beyond their obvious status as members of the Troy business community.

After spending most of their time in Troy renting the buildings they worked out of, these businesses have all purchased properties on 3rd Street. They deserve a round of applause. They did this without any type of Metroplex Authority. They did not receive any government incentives. They simply had faith in the City of Troy and in their business, and made the ultimate investment. This type of growth is organic and sustainable.

The idea that five businesses would purchase buildings in a one-block area should give even the most hardened Troy pessimist hope.

On the very same block we have two investors that have found their way back to Troy after being absent for far too long. I first met Jeffrey and Deane Pfeil after they purchased the Ready-Jell building in Lansingburgh and planned to put in high-end lofts near Powers Park. Some looked at the idea as a pie in the sky plan that would never fly.

I saw two people that, like me, decided to dream big and go for it. As their project chugs along in Lansingburgh, soon they will be the ones with the last laugh. Having already played a major role in the creation of Stuyvesant Plaza in Albany, and the Broadway area of Saratoga, Jeffrey and Deane will soon be known for taking part in the great revitalization of Troy.

You can imagine my excitement then when I heard this summer that they had purchased the Stanley Building on the corner of State and Third Streets. As one of the most prominent buildings in our downtown, the Stanley Building, which will from this point forward be known as The Conservatory, has been dormant for far too long.

Jeffrey and Deane have been working closely with City staffers, namely Economic Development Coordinator Sondra Little. Their work with Sondra resulted in the City receiving a New York State Main Street Grant for \$200,000. Half of this money will go to the City of Troy to distribute in smaller grants to building owners along Third Street for both the rehabilitation of upper floors used for rental units, and ground floor commercial uses.

The remaining \$100,000 will go to the Pfeil's for projects improving The Conservatory. The refurbishment of this Troy landmark is another ambitious project that will be a gem when completed. Commercial on the first floor, luxury living spaces on the upper floors, and parking under the sidewalks will make it unlike any other project in the area. Jeffrey and Deane are joining us tonight and I want to publicly thank them for all their hard work and firm belief that Troy is a great place to be. Thank you very much.

To be sure, The Conservatory and general business environment along Third Street is exciting, but a reconstruction project several blocks away is generating enough buzz to

keep an optimist busy for months.

During the State of the City speech one year ago, I commented that it would be the ability of all four entities involved in the Congress-Ferry Street project to cooperate that would determine how much potential would be reached in this area. During the first few months of collaboration between the City of Troy, RPI, Troy Housing Authority, and Rensselaer County we did encounter the stumbling blocks many foresaw.

Yet the leadership of each entity was firm in their commitment of seeing this project through. In the fall of 2005 we held a press conference to announce that the four separate groups had come together and chosen a developer. That choice was a consortium consisting of the United Group of Companies and John Hedley. Their team includes members from local businesses such as Saratoga Associates, Ryan Biggs, TAP, Sawchuk Brown, White, Osterman, and Hanna, and the list goes on and on.

For several months, representatives from the four entities involved in the reconstruction of Congress/Ferry Street have been meeting every two weeks with the chosen developer to hammer out a master plan that would meet the needs and goals of all involved.

Despite each having different goals in mind, this amazingly unique process has gone extremely well, and before the snow melts we will have a keen idea of what could happen in that undeveloped area.

Make no mistake, we will come to the public and ask for input before any shovel hits the ground, but the scope of what this project could mean to the City of Troy is undeniable. There will be more than \$100 million in development that will cross a broad spectrum of interests. Mixed-use development, retail, government buildings, and housing built to create an area full of promise, and of course, plenty of tax base.

This administration takes no job more serious than striving to build the tax base in Troy. The Congress-Ferry Street reconstruction is an exciting element in the quest to lift the burden of taxes off the backs of our residents. The rezoning of the Hoosick Street Corridor and the South Troy Waterfront in 2004 occurred with the hope that we could develop those two sections of the City. We are slowly beginning to see results.

Along Hoosick Street, developers are meeting with our Planning Department on a weekly basis. A new medical arts complex is set to begin construction this summer, and other businesses are interested as well. There will soon be an interesting dynamic on Hoosick Street as it moves farther away from its past use as a residential street. Thanks to a number of factors, including daily commuting and close access to Vermont, the amount of cars on this road is something we must begin to capitalize on.

Financially, building a tax base is of extreme importance. For two years, Deborah Witkowski and Dan Crawley have worked tirelessly to change the way Troy budgets each year.

We have cut more than a dozen jobs from the City that we deemed to be unnecessary patronage positions. This represents a savings of more than \$500,000 annually in salaries and benefits. At the same time, we have added positions that help residents directly, two additional police officers, and a grants writer.

Meanwhile, mandated costs continue to rise at an alarming rate:

- Since 2001, Health Care costs have risen from less than \$5 million to an estimated \$10.3 million this year.
- Retirement costs have also undergone a dramatic increase, rising from \$300,000 in 2001 to more than \$3.8 million this year alone.
- Gasoline rates will jump an additional 60 percent from 2005 projections, costing us \$400,000 this year.

To be fair, each municipality in New York State is dealing with the above issues. Finding ways to manage these problems is what sets leaders apart. In the City of Troy we are aggressively dealing with all of our financial issues, and have gone from being a symbol of disgrace in the mid-1990's to a City that is publicized as an example for spending efficiency.

This year we were awarded an additional \$1 million in New York State Aid from Governor George Pataki in response to our solid fiscal planning. The plan that Troy submitted to New York State was so well received we are being used as a model in the Office of State Comptroller's Local Government Management Guide.

There is one final point of concern on the 2006 budget. It is a tight budget, a solid spending plan that takes into account the situation of Troy residents. We could have increased taxes more than the 1.48 percent we proposed, but did not do so in an effort to help the residents of Troy. It was not an election year budget, as several politicians would have had you believe. You can be assured that we are on strong financial footing.

Each and every day the men and women employed by the City of Troy work hard to provide a quality living environment for our residents. It is the behind the scenes work that many people do not see which is essential to our growth. The past two years we have showcased a River Street Festival in June, attended by more than 10,000 people each year. Those events are important to this City, as they offer us a chance to showcase what we have and prove to others what we can be.

At Frear Park Course golf course, the City has increased its number of rounds the past two years for the first time in a decade. Most of the credit for that marvelous turnaround is the job done by Golf Superintendent Pete Scheeren. I cannot even begin to describe the comments we have received about the golf course in the past two years. Pete and Mark Yamin do an amazing job and we are proud to have them as part of the team.

Soon golf will not be the only noteworthy activity at Frear Park. Later this spring, the Troy-Albany Youth Hockey will end its long relationship with the ice rink at Frear. Under the leadership of George Rogers, the City will reopen this building to serve a larger cross-section of our population. Basketball courts and soccer fields will eventually offer great year round opportunities for the youth in our City.

Department of Public Utilities head Neil Bonesteel recently told me that the Tomhannock Reservoir is celebrating its 100-year anniversary this year. It may seem small, but that is something we should celebrate. For the second consecutive year our water was a finalist at the New York State Fair for the best in the Empire State. Though we finished second

this year, and I am inquiring about a recount, we should be proud of that.

We should be proud of the fact that 397 years ago Henry Hudson, one of the greatest explorers in history, made his way up to a point on the Hudson that sits not a mile away from here. I mention that date with anticipation, as we will work hard to celebrate that remarkable 400-year anniversary in 2009.

With her vast experience along the Hudson River, I have asked Judy Breselor to chair a committee that will plan an extravaganza for October of 2009 in Troy, New York, where communities from up and down the Hudson River will participate. We should be proud of that.

And then there was last week, when we experienced a moment that makes my job both easy and difficult. On a Tuesday afternoon, when all seemed relatively quiet in the City, there was a tragic event in Lansingburgh. William Beddow was struck by a medical condition that caused the car he occupied with his wife Janet to accelerate through a fence along the Hudson River.

As you know that car was sent down an embankment and into the freezing river. Today we continue to mourn the deaths of two-longtime Lansingburgh residents that had called Troy home for more than 60 years. The grief of their families is shared by all of the residents of the City of Troy, including the men and women who risked their lives to try and save Mr. And Mrs. Beddow.

Rescue officials, particularly firefighters, are an amazing breed of people. Despite their most sincere efforts they are often inconsolable when they do not succeed in trying to save a life. Many of them feel as if they have failed. I respect that, but I do not agree with it.

Police officers are similar. They go about their job, never trying to get too high or too low, knowing the climate could change any minute. I would like to read a letter I received this week from the family of William and Janet:

Mayor Tutunjian, Police Chief Kaiser, Fire Chief Garrett:

The family of William and Janet Beddow would like to express our deepest gratitude to the heroic members of the Troy Police, fire and emergency services departments for their selfless attempts to rescue our beloved family members. Specifically, officers Jason Valente, Ron Epstein, and Gerald Young who risked their own lives by entering the frigid waters of the Hudson River without protective gear. We would further like to extend our thanks to Michael DiRubertis and his crew that assisted the emergency services teams in the rescue attempt. Their quick thinking and response made it possible for the officers to attempt a rescue. The community of Troy is fortunate to have such dedicated servants. We will never forget.

Mr. And Mrs. Beddow lost their lives last week, but the residents of Troy were once again reminded that they have heroes around them all of the time. I want to take a minute to thank our employees who went above and beyond the call of duty last week.

It is in these times that we also find amongst ourselves, the regular citizens of Troy,

everyday heroes. Dean Stebbens and Michael DiReburtis, upon hearing of the accident on a scanner rushed to the scene with two tow trucks hoping to help out. I thank them for doing their best last Tuesday, and know in my heart that if something as equally tragic were to happen again, they would be standing right there.

At this time I would like to honor all of the men you see seated beside you today. I will read the names of all those involved in the rescue and ask that they stand together as one group now, a true team, and that you show them your deepest gratitude.

Firefighters Dave Judge, Matthew Dudek, Frank Gavigan, Tom Casey, Paul Gallerie, Randy Pascucci, Jack Mulligan, Ray Littlejohn, Captains Bob Davis, Eric McMahon, Lieutenants. Mike Spinelli, Eric Koblenzer, Tom Vumbaco, Joe Reilly, Rich Cellucci, Battalion Chief Ed Cummings, and Fire Chief Tom Garrett.

Police Officers Jason Valente, Ronald Epstein, Gerald Young, Mark Mason, Patrick Bornt, Brian Gross, Sean Kittle, Robert Smith, Joseph West, Sergeants Gary Gordon, Michael Parrow, Joseph Centanni, John Cooney, Brian Owens, John Coons, Captain Tony Magonetto, and Assistant Chief John Tedesco.

Ladies and gentleman, this group of people, and all of their co-workers, consistently put their lives on the line for you each and every day. I ask that you join me once more in thanking them.

As I close tonight, I hope that you will indulge me for a bit longer and hear a story I have to share.

Several weeks ago I was enjoying a cup of coffee with my wife at her downtown café. Of course I cannot give this speech or talk about all of our successes without thanking my wife Francesca. She is there for me every day of the week, and I truly appreciate that about her.

As we were sitting in the shop talking about the City, we were approached by a man who explained that he had been following reports of Troy in the paper, the news, and the Internet. And he did all of this despite the fact he called West Orange, New Jersey his home.

For years this couple had zipped through the City of Troy on their way to weekends in Vermont. Until one fall afternoon a couple of months ago when this gentleman and his wife “accidentally” stumbled upon Troy by missing Route 7 and taking the downtown exit off of the Collar City Bridge. As they made their way around the City they were stunned by the architecture, the unique shops lining the downtown streets, and the friendly people all around.

In subsequent trips back to Troy they continued to fall in love. Then they made an amazing decision. They have decided to sell their house in West Orange and move to Troy where they will spend their retirement years in our great City. These stories are happening more and more. People are finding out what most of us in this room have believed for a long time. Troy is the place to be. For these people, a wrong turn became a right turn for them, and for us. That is something to be proud of.

I leave you tonight with the knowledge that the State of our City is strong. We have a built a wonderful foundation, and I pledge to each and every resident, that we will continue to work our hardest, develop new initiatives, find ways to maintain this great energy, and best of all, never stop believing in the City of Troy.

Good night and God bless.